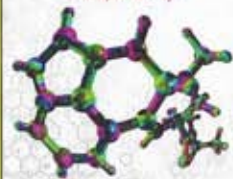


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The Real Culture Wars

WHAT IF ALL OUR DIFFERENCES COME DOWN TO WHETHER WE
FOCUS MORE ON OURSELVES OR ON OUR COMMUNITY?



CLASH!

By Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner

IT'S NO SECRET that where we grow up shapes how we look at life. But how often do we even attempt to explore the divide between, say, a tight-knit group of blue-collar Alabamans and a flock of loosely rooted Manhattanites? Is it possible to embrace both models of community? In *Clash!*, two psychologists map the gulf between what they dub “independent” and “interdependent” cultural styles—individualistic Americans versus community-minded Japanese, for example—and urge us to make the best of both worlds. Below, a sampling of clashing cultural mindsets.

—Matt Huston

Trade-Off #1

Be Friendly/Back Off

“In the South, there’s a whole tradition of trying to relate to other people by delighting them,” says Conner, a Tennessee native, about the fabled Southern hospitality. “We see conversation not just as a way of relaying information but also as a way of building relationships.” Yet that level of interpersonal effort can take a toll, she says. At school in New England, Conner learned that “being a little less sensitive to all that social information has its benefits.” Her classmates, she noticed, exerted less effort on such insistent politeness and weren’t so quick to take offense at minor social transgressions.

Trade-Off #2

Relax/Take the Reins

Working-class citizens often know—by necessity—how to roll with the punches, but the Great Recession caught many in the middle class off guard. “We don’t recognize how much effort and intelligence it takes to adjust and just make the best of a bad situation,” says Markus. Yet many from interdependent, blue-collar communities face the opposite challenge upon entering white-collar careers that prize individual drive and initiative: They must learn how to be in control, to shape their own paths instead of just accepting whatever comes their way.

Trade-Off #3

Shut Up/Speak Up

Many Americans could stand to talk less and listen more. “In the West, we put so much emphasis on expressing our uniqueness that we are often trying to remake the wheel—we don’t always capitalize on the genius of others,” Markus says. In some Eastern cultures, active listening comes more naturally. One study described in *Clash!* found that Koreans are much likelier than Americans to think that talking hinders thinking—a reasonable philosophy most of the time. Later studies found that, empirically, this idea is culturally specific: While Asian Americans do better when they solve problems silently, European Americans perform better when they think out loud.